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GEN. ROBERT E. LEE.

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COMMEMORATIVE ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

NEW YORK SOUTHERN SOCIETY

ON THE

ANNIVERSARY OF THE GREAT COMMANDER'S BIRTH

January 19th, 1906

BY

DR. JOHN A. WYETH.

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(In the New York Sun of Sunday, January 21st, 1906,  
which published the address, was given the  
following notice.)

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Night before last the Southerners in New York—their name is legion, and a loyal legion they are—celebrated General ROBERT E. LEE's birth. We print on another page the address in which Dr. JOHN A. WYETH attempted to measure, in the light of recent and contemporaneous opinion, the steadily growing admiration in which others than Southerners hold the memory of this great Virginian and good man. The historical estimate of LEE's character and career, as distinguished from either the passionate eulogy of fellow partisanship or the prejudice of sectional hatred, is fast being formulated. To this process Dr. WYETH's sympathetic address, with its most interesting exhibits, is an important contribution.





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## GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE.

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The South may claim with pardonable pride that it furnished not only the President of each of the divided sections in the struggle for the establishment of a separate Confederacy, but the great central figure of the civil war for the North as well as for the South. History will accord that Abraham Lincoln was the one conspicuous figure on the side of the Union, and for the South none will challenge that claim for Lee. They were, moreover, representatives of the widely divergent classes of our section, the plebeian and the patrician. The story of Lincoln might well be classed with

“The short and simple annals of the poor,”

while Lee came straight from the cavaliers and their descendants, the wealthy cultured aristocracy of Virginia. “His father, Colonel Henry Lee, better known as “Light Horse Harry” was the *beau sabreur* of the American army in the War of Independence, and it was he who proclaimed George Washington as “First in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen.”

Upon his mother's side he claimed the lineage of the Carters of Shirley. Born on January 19th, 1807, his childhood and youth were passed in the cultivated circles of the tidewater region of Virginia. At the age of 18 he entered West Point and completing the course of study without a single mark of demerit he graduated second in a class of forty-six. For several years he served in the Engineer Corps constructing

coast defenses, and for a part of this time in charge of the astronomical department of the Government. In 1832 he married the daughter of George W. Parke Custis, the adopted son of Gen. Washington, and later was made Captain on the staff in the Mexican war.

Of all the brilliant reputations among the younger group of officers which were won in that campaign Lee's was the most conspicuous. Upon him the Commander-in-Chief leaned as upon no other. At Cerro Gordo he was brevetted Major for exceptional gallantry. At Contreras and Cherubusco he was officially proclaimed for meritorious conduct, and on account of a wound received in the assault on Chapultepec, September 13th, 1847, he was given his promotion to Lieutenant-Colonel. It was at Contreras, when the army was baffled, that the quick eye of Lee discovered, by a daring reconnoissance, a line of approach hidden from the enemy by which the position might be taken. This the Commander in Chief of the army characterized as "the greatest feat of physical and moral courage performed by any individual during the entire campaign."

In his official report Gen. Scott said: "I am compelled to make special mention of Capt. R. E. Lee, engineer. He greatly distinguished himself at the siege of Vera Cruz, was indefatigable during these operations in reconnoissances, as daring as laborious, and of the utmost value. Nor was he less conspicuous in planting batteries and in conducting columns to their stations under the heavy fire of the enemy." He further says: "Capt. Lee, so constantly distinguished, also bore important orders from me, until he fainted from a wound and the loss of two nights sleep at the batteries."

After the Mexican war he was appointed, in 1852, Superintendent of the Military Academy at West Point, and in 1855 Lieutenant-Colonel of the Second Cavalry, under Col. Albert Sidney Johnston. In 1859 he was directed by the President of the United States to arrest John Brown and his followers in their murderous invasion of Virginia, and on March 10th, 1861, he was appointed Colonel in the United States army.

When the Southern States were seceding and war seemed inevitable, upon the recommendation of Gen. Scott, then Commander in Chief, President Lincoln offered Lee the command of the armies of the Union. Virginia had not yet seceded, but Lee, looking into the future and feeling assured that his native State would upon any act of aggression make common cause with the other Southern States, declined the tempting offer.

In a letter written April 20th, 1861, he made that never to be forgotten declaration: "With all my devotion to the Union and the feeling of loyalty and duty as an American citizen, I have not been able to make up my mind to raise my hand against my relatives, my children, my home. Save in defence of my native State, with the sincere hope that my poor services may never be needed, I hope I may never be called upon to draw my sword."

When at length hostilities began and Virginia took her place in the Confederacy the people of the Old Dominion with one voice turned to him as commander of her army. Then:

"Forth from its scabbard, pure and bright,  
Flashed the sword of Lee!  
Far in the front of the deadly fight,

High o'er the brave in the cause of Right,  
Its stainless sheen, like a beacon light,  
Led on to victory.

Out of its scabbard! Never hand  
Waved sword from stain as free,  
Nor purer sword led braver band,  
Nor braver bled for a brighter land,  
Nor brighter land had a cause so grand,  
Nor cause a chief like Lee!

The story of his military career is practically the story of the Army of Northern Virginia, and it reads more like romance than history. Through four years of the bloodiest war known to history at that time that army, composed of the flower of Southern manhood, under its matchless leader, made a record of victories never surpassed in the annals of warfare, a record which we of the South and our children's children to the remotest ages should claim as our proudest heritage.

He assumed command of this army in June, 1862, when McClellan was immediately in front of Richmond. On June 26th, with an army inferior in numbers and equipment, he attacked the forces of McClellan in their intrenchments and for seven days the bloody conflict raged, until McClellan took refuge under the protection of his gunboats at Harrison's Landing. This army defeated, Lee turned upon a second larger than his own, marching upon Richmond from another direction.

By one of the most brilliant and daring movements in the history of wars Lee, with his able Lieutenant, Jackson, routed Pope's army at Groveton and Second Manassas and drove him for safety under the protection of the fortifications at Washington.

McClellan had been removed for his defeat and Pope followed in his train. Disregarding both of these defeated armies, Lee moved rapidly into Maryland, captured Harper's Ferry and its large garrison on the way and fought at Antietam on September 17th, 1862, the bloodiest battle of the civil war. McClellan, who after Pope's defeat had been reinstated in command, was again removed for failing to inflict a crushing defeat upon Lee, and Burnside was made Commander in Chief of the Army of the Potomac.

In December of that year this same army of Lee signally defeated the army of Burnside at Fredericksburg. Burnside was removed and Gen. Hooker placed in command. In May, 1863, Hooker marched on Richmond, having issued a general order in which he said that the Confederate army must "either ingloriously fly or come out from behind its intrenchments, where certain destruction awaited it." A few days after this announcement was made, Hooker's army was surprised and attacked by Lee and Jackson simultaneously in front and rear at Chancellorsville and overwhelmed, fleeing in the greatest disorder from the field. Lee then invaded Pennsylvania, where at Gettysburg after three days of bloody conflict, unable to carry the Federal position, he remained twenty-four hours in line of battle with his army in their immediate front inviting attack and then withdrew without interruption to Virginia.

It was in 1864, in the campaign from the Wilderness to Petersburg, that the star of Lee reached its zenith. Under his leadership the Army of Northern Virginia up to this time in offensive warfare had held every battlefield upon which it had fought with the exception of Gettysburg and Sharpsburg or Antietam,

and upon these fields, although it failed to beat the army pitted against it, it stood in battle array on each occasion for twenty-four hours, was not attacked and marched away unmolested.

He was now to show that in defensive fighting he was a greater master of the art of war than in his offensive operations. Grant, with the largest army ever marshalled upon this continent under a single commander, with unlimited resources of men and money, with the world to draw upon for all that was most useful in destructive warfare, advanced upon this army of Lee wanting in everything but valor, and so decimated that as Grant expressed it "it had robbed the cradle and the grave" to fill the gaps between the veterans that still survived. There followed from May 5th, 1864, in the Wilderness, at Spottsylvania Court House, at Cold Harbor and the North Anna a series of conflicts so frightful in their havoc that the history of this campaign might well be written in blood.

The most recent, and in my opinion the most reliable history of the United States, written by James Ford Rhodes of Boston, a conscientious student, a capable analyst and just recorder, says: "Grant's loss from May 4th to June 12th in the campaign from the Rapidan to the James was 54,929, a number nearly equal to Lee's whole army at the commencement of the Union advance. The confidence in Grant of many officers and men had been shaken."

At Spottsylvania Nicolay and Hay, authors of the Life of Lincoln, say "Grant was completely checkmated."

That this is true is evident from the fact that turning aside from the direct route to Richmond, with



Lee's army in front of him, which army he announced in the beginning of the campaign as his objective, he marched toward the James River, which he crossed in the effort to capture Petersburg by surprise.

The army of Lee was, however, at Petersburg in time, and there held Grant at bay for nine months of the summer and winter of '64 and '65.

As far as the Confederates were concerned, the annals of the siege of Petersburg might well be termed the annals of starvation, exposure and misery. True to its colors, the army of Lee was starving to death. The Commissary General reported that "the Army of Northern Virginia was living literally from hand to mouth." Beef sold for \$6 per pound and flour at \$1,000 a barrel. At one time, pleading with his Government for food, Lee said that for three days his men had been in line of battle and had not tasted meat.

In the early spring of 1865, after nine months of persistent effort Grant with 113,000 men, well fed, clad and armed, broke through the lines defended by Lee's force of 49,000 veterans, half starved, ragged and most of them shoeless.

Then came the end at Appomattox, where on April 9th, 1865, the remnant of this once magnificent army, now numbering less than 28,000 (of which only 15,000 were carrying arms) surrendered, and the Confederacy was no more.

Upon this world's stage no more pathetic scene, no more heroic incident has ever been witnessed. With what pride the generations yet unborn shall claim descent from those who, true to their sense of duty, which Lee himself said was "the sublimest word in the English language," fought under the banner of

this immortal soldier and died on those victorious fields, or surviving, stood true to his colors at Appomattox.

In his farewell address to his army he said: "You will take with you the satisfaction that proceeds from the consciousness of duty faithfully performed; and I earnestly pray that a merciful God will extend to you His blessing and protection. With an unceasing admiration of your constancy and devotion to your country and a grateful remembrance of your kind and generous consideration of myself, I bid you an affectionate farewell."

Soon after the surrender he accepted the presidency of Washington College at Lexington, Va. He had refused large proffers of money for his services or the use of his name for various enterprises. He declined them all, saying he felt it his duty to live with his people and to endeavor in educating the youth of the South to do all in his power to aid in the restoration of peace and harmony and the acceptance of the policy of the State or general Government.

Though war in all ages and with all people arouses that which is worst in human nature, and though bloodiest and bitterest is internecine war, it still seems difficult to believe even after the lapse of so short a time as forty years that for the part this noble man took in obedience to his conviction of duty Andrew Johnson, then President of the United States, obtained his indictment for treason. Against this unwarranted and ignoble act the great soldier Grant arose and stayed the hand of malice and persecution. It seems equally incredible to conceive that within two months of the death of Lee, which took place on October 12th, 1870, speaking to a resolution which

had for its object the return of the estate of Arlington to the family of Lee, Charles Sumner said in his place in the Senate: "Eloquent Senators have already characterized the proposition and the traitor it seeks to commemorate. I am not disposed to speak of Gen. Lee. It is enough to say that he stands high in the catalogue of those who have imbrued their hands in their country's blood. I hand him over to the avenging pen of history.

As man and soldier "the avenging pen of history" has already written this of Lee: In nobility of character, in moral grandeur, attested by his humanity, he lived "the model for all future times." In the annals of war his place is with the greatest.

What of this charge of treason and what kind of traitor was Lee? A distinguished soldier and citizen of Massachusetts, Charles Francis Adams, reared in the New England school of politics, himself throughout the war in the army which confronted Lee, son of that Charles Francis Adams who as United States Minister to England during the civil war probably did as much as any other one man to defeat the cause of the Confederacy, grandson of John Quincy Adams and great-grandson of that elder Adams who succeeded Washington as President of the United States, a man who so differed from Lee in his interpretation of the duty an American citizen owes as between his State and the central Government that he declared he would go against Massachusetts for the Union, has written this for history:

If Robert E. Lee was a traitor, so also and indisputably was George Washington. Washington furnishes a precedent at every point. A Virginian, like Lee, he was also a British subject; he had fought

under the British flag, as Lee had fought under that of the United States; when, in 1776, Virginia seceded from the British Empire he went with his State, just as Lee went eighty-five years later; subsequently Washington commanded armies in the field designated by those opposed to them as "rebels" and whose descendants now glorify them as "the rebels of '76," much as Lee later commanded and at last surrendered much larger armies, also designated "rebels" by those they confronted. Except in their outcome the cases were, therefore, precisely alike; and logic is logic. It consequently appears to follow that if Lee was a traitor Washington was also.

He further says:

In him there are exemplified those lofty elements of personal character which, typifying Virginia at her highest, made Washington possible. Essentially a soldier, Robert E. Lee was a many sided man. I might speak of him as a strategist, but of this aspect of the man enough has perhaps been said. I might refer to the respect, the confidence and love with which he inspired those under his command. I might dilate on his restraint in victory; his patient endurance in the face of adverse fortune; the serene dignity with which he in the end triumphed over defeat. But, passing over all these well worn themes, I shall confine myself to that one attribute of his which, recognized in a soldier by an opponent, I cannot but regard as his surest and loftiest title to enduring fame. I refer to his humanity in arms and his scrupulous regard for the most advanced rules of modern warfare.

Denying the contention that war must be made hell, holding up to execration the authors of the bloodiest deeds in history, this generous foe and great American said:

I rejoice that no such hatred attaches to the name of Lee. Reckless of life to attain the legitimate ends

of war, he sought to mitigate its horrors. Opposed to him at Gettysburg, I, here forty years later, do him justice. No more creditable order ever issued from a commanding General than that formulated and signed at Chambersburg by Robert E. Lee, as toward the close of June, 1863, he advanced on a war of invasion. "No greater disgrace," he then declared, "can befall the army, and through it our whole people, than the perpetration of barbarous outrages upon the innocent and defenceless. Such proceedings not only disgrace the perpetrators and all connected with them, but are subversive of the discipline and efficiency of the army, and destructive of the ends of our movement. It must be remembered that we make war only on armed men."

In scope and spirit Lee's order was observed, and I doubt if a hostile force ever advanced into an enemy's country or fell back from it in retreat leaving behind less cause of hate and bitterness than did the Army of Northern Virginia in that memorable campaign which culminated at Gettysburg.

In dwelling on this theme, in contrast to Lee's humanity may not "the avenging pen of history" quote from "Ohio in the War" by the Hon. Whitelaw Reid, at this time Ambassador of the United States at the Court of St. James's, who in speaking of the burning of Columbia wrote:

It was the most monstrous barbarity of this barbarous march. Before his movement began Gen. Sherman begged permission to turn his army loose in South Carolina and devastate it. He used this permission to the full. He protested that he did not wage war upon women and children. But, under the operations of his orders, the last morsel of food was taken from hundreds of destitute families that his soldiers might feast in needless and riotous abundance. Before his eyes rose, day after day, the mournful clouds of smoke on every side that told of old people

and their grandchildren driven, in midwinter, from the only roofs there were to shelter them, by the flames which the wantonness of his soldiers had kindled. Yet, if a single soldier was punished for a single outrage or theft during that entire movement we have found no mention of it in all the voluminous records of the march.

May not this avenging pen of history which Sumner invoked, record that order of Gen. Halleck, chief of staff and military adviser to President Lincoln, which said to Gen. Sherman: "Should you capture Charleston I hope that by some accident the place may be destroyed, and if a little salt should be sown upon its site it may prevent the growth of future crops of nullification and secession," and Sherman's reply in his despatch of December 24th, 1864, "I will bear in mind your hint as to Charleston, and don't think salt will be necessary. When I move, the Fifteenth Corps will be on the right of the right wing, and their position will bring them, naturally, into Charleston first; and if you have watched the history of that corps, you will have remarked that they generally do their work up pretty well. The truth is the whole army is burning with an insatiable desire to wreak vengeance upon South Carolina."

And may it not transcribe upon its pages that other order to his efficient Lieut. Hunter: "He [Grant] further says that he wants your troops to eat out Virginia clear and clean, as far as they go, so that crows flying over it for the balance of the season will have to carry their provender with them.

Of Lee as a General, President Roosevelt, in his life of Thomas H. Benton, says:

The world has never seen better soldiers than those who followed Lee, and their leader will undoubtedly rank as, without any exception, the very greatest of all the great captains that the English-speaking peoples have brought forth—and this, although the last and chief of his antagonists may himself claim to stand as the full equal of Marlborough and Wellington.

From no more capable source could higher praise be given.

In the "Story of a Soldier's Life." Field Marshal Viscount Wolseley, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, speaking of the Seven Days battle, says:

Gen. McClellan's splendidly equipped army had been driven from the peninsula and Gen. Pope had been made short work of on the Rappahannock. They were unable to cope with Gen. Lee's army, though it was far inferior in strength. In fact, the Confederates had won all along the line, thanks to the ably conceived and well calculated strategy of the great Virginian leader and the brilliant tactics of Stonewall Jackson and other capable soldiers and to the superior fighting qualities of their splendid and patriotic rank and file.

That campaign was a masterpiece; both in conception and execution and did high honor to the soldierlike spirit and patriotism of the ill shod, overworked, badly clothed regimental officers and men of the Southern army.

According to my notion of military history there is as much instruction both in strategy and in tactics to be gleaned from Gen. Lee's operations of 1862 as there is to be found in Napoleon's campaigns of 1796. Though badly found in weapons, ammunition, military equipment, &c., his army had nevertheless achieved great things. His men were so badly shod (indeed, a considerable portion had no boots or shoes) that at the battle of Antietam Gen. Lee assured me he never

had more than 35,000 men with him. The remainder of his army, shoeless and footsore, were straggling along the roads in the rear trying in vain to reach him in time for the battle.

Of this visit to Lee Gen. Wolseley says:

As I waited outside of Gen. Lee's tent while his aide-de-camp entered to tell him who I was and to deliver him a letter from the Confederate Secretary of War, I remarked it had the name of a Colonel of some New Jersey regiment printed upon it. Subsequently I referred to the fact in my conversation with him. He laughed and said: "You will find every tent, gun, even our blankets, accoutrements and all the military equipment we possess stamped with the United States initials." Every incident in that visit is indelibly stamped on my memory. All he said to me then and during subsequent conversations is still fresh in my recollection. It is natural it should be so, for he was the ablest General and to me seemed the greatest man I ever conversed with, and yet I have had the privilege of meeting Von Moltke and Prince Bismarck.

Gen. Lee was one of the few men who ever seriously impressed and awed me with their inherent greatness. Forty years has come and gone since our meeting and yet the majesty of his manly bearing, the genial winning grace, the sweetness of his smile and the impressive dignity of his old fashioned style of dress come back to me among the most cherished of my recollections. His greatness made me humble and I never felt my own insignificance more keenly than I did in his presence. He was then about 50 years of age, with hair and beard nearly white. Tall, extremely handsome and strongly built, very soldier-like in bearing, he looked a thoroughbred gentleman. Care had, however, already wrinkled his brow and there came at moments a look of sadness into his clear, honest and speaking dark brown eyes that indicated how much his overwhelming national responsi-



bilities had already told upon him. He was indeed a beautiful character and of him it might truthfully be written "in righteousness did he judge and make war."

Lieut.-Col. G. F. R. Henderson, professor of military art and history in the Staff College of the British army, in his life of Stonewall Jackson, says:

If the names of the great captains, soldiers and sailors be recalled, it will be seen that it is to the breadth of their strategical conceptions rather than to their tactical skill that they owe their fame. We have the strategist, a Hannibal, a Napoleon or a Lee, triumphing with inferior numbers over adversaries who are tacticians and nothing more.

In speaking of Lee's audacity in attacking with a force inferior in numbers and equipment McClellan's thoroughly organized army in their entrenchments in the Seven Days battle, he says:

From Hannibal to Moltke there has been no great captain who has neglected to study the character of his opponent and who did not trade on the knowledge thus acquired, and it was this knowledge which justified Lee's audacity. He was no hare brained leader, but a profound thinker, following the highest principles of the military art. That he had weighed the disconcerting effect which the sudden appearance of the victorious Jackson, with an army of unknown strength, would produce upon McClellan goes without saying.

Again he writes:

Lee, with his extraordinary insight into character, had played on Pope (at Second Manassas) and his strategy was justified by success. In the space of three weeks he had carried the war from the James to the Potomac. With an army that at no time exceeded

55,000, he had driven 80,000 into the fortifications of Washington. He had captured 30 guns, 7,000 prisoners and 20,000 rifles. He had killed or wounded 13,500 Federals, destroying supplies and materials of enormous value and all this with a loss to the Confederates of 10,000 officers and men.

“If, as Moltke avers, the junction of two armies on the field of battle is the highest achievement of military genius, the campaign against Pope has seldom been surpassed; and the great counter stroke at Manassas is sufficient in itself to make Lee’s reputation as a tactician. Tried by this test alone Lee stands out as one of the greatest soldiers of all times. Not only against Pope, but against McClellan at Gaines’s Mill, against Burnside at Fredericksburg and against Hooker at Chancellorsville, he succeeded in carrying out the operation of which Moltke speaks; and in each case with the same result of surprising his adversary. None knew better how to apply that great principle of strategy to march divided, but to fight concentrated.”

“In this action Lee violated both of the maxims of Napoleon—never to divide an army into two columns unable to communicate, or to attempt a junction in the presence of a concentrated enemy, but Lee knew his men. He violated the last section of this maxim because he knew Pope, and the first because he knew Jackson. It is rare indeed that such strategy succeeds. Hasdrubal, divided from Hannibal by many miles and a Consular army, fell back to the Metaurus, and Rome was saved. Two thousand years later Prince Frederick Charles, divided by a few marches and two Austrian army corps from the Crown Prince, lingered so long upon the Iser that the supremacy of Prussia trembled in the balance. It has been remarked that

after Jackson's death Lee never again attempted those great turning movements which had achieved his most brilliant victories. Never again did he divide his army to reunite it on the field of battle. The reason is not far to see. There was now no General in the Confederate army to whom he dared confide the charge of the detached wing, and in possessing one such general he had been more fortunate than Napoleon."

"It is noteworthy that Moltke once, at Königgratz, carried out the operation referred to: Wellington, twice, at Victoria and Toulouse: Napoleon, although he several times attempted it, never, except at Ulm, with complete success."

In his "History of the American War," Lieut.-Col. Fletcher of England, says:

The armies of Grant and Lee were still in the vicinity of Spottsylvania Court House. The former, notwithstanding his vastly preponderating strength, was waiting reinforcements. The latter, with only a small and overworked army to rely on, was expecting the arrival of troops from the Shenandoah.

It must ever remain a marvel how this small force, ill-supplied, overworked and harassed by continual fighting and marching by night and by day, could hold its ground against the almost innumerable host in Grant's command. That it did so, inflicting losses far heavier than it sustained and creating a belief in the mind of the enemy of numbers far larger than it contained, has been already shown.

Two of the three armies of Sigel, Meade and Butler had been forced to seek shelter behind fortified lines, the third had been brought to a halt to await reinforcements and the arteries which supplied life to the capital of the Confederacy had been preserved.

Of the movement to the North Anna River in the Wilderness campaign he says: "Here Lee by the exercise of consummate generalship foiled his opponent." And of the final end of Grant's endeavor to crush Lee in the campaign he says: "After many battles and losses of which few wars can afford a parallel and which surpassed in number the whole strength of the enemy's force, Gen. Grant had brought his army to a position which McClellan had reached with far greater ease and far less expenditure of life two years previously."

From the History of the United States by the distinguished writer, Mr. James Ford Rhodes of Boston, I quote this concerning Lee:

The Confederates had an advantage in that Robert E. Lee espoused their cause; to some extent appreciated at the time, this in reality was an advantage beyond computation. Had he followed the example of Scott and Thomas and remained in service under the old flag in active command of the Army of the Potomac, how differently might not events have turned out.

Lee, now 54 years old, his face exhibiting the ruddy glow of health, was physically and morally a splendid example of manhood. Able to trace his lineage far back into the mother country, the best blood of Virginia flowed in his veins. Drawing from a knightly race all their virtues, he had inherited none of their vices. Honest, sincere, simple, magnanimous, forbearing, refined, courteous yet dignified and proud, never lacking self command, he was in all respects a true man. Graduating from West Point his life had been exclusively that of a soldier, yet he had none of the soldier's bad habits. He used neither liquor nor tobacco and indulged rarely in a social glass of wine, and cared nothing for the pleasures of the table. He

was a good engineer and under Gen. Scott had won distinction in Mexico. The work that had fallen to his lot he had performed in a systematic manner and with conscientious care. "Duty is the sublimest word in our language," he wrote to his son. Sincerely religious, Providence to him was a verity, and it may be truly said he walked with God.

A serious man, he anxiously watched from his station in Texas the progress of events since Lincoln's election. "Thinking slavery as an institution a moral and political evil," having a soldier's devotion to his flag and a warm attachment to Gen. Scott, he loved the Union and it was especially dear to him as the fruit of the mighty labors of Washington. Although believing that the South had just grievances due to the aggression of the North, he did not think these evils great enough to resort to the remedy of revolution and to him secession was nothing less. "Still," he wrote in January, 1861, "a union that can only be maintained by swords and bayonets and in which strife and civil war are to take the place of brotherly love and kindness has no charm for me. If the Union is dissolved and the Government disrupted I shall return to my native State and share the miseries of my people and save in defence will draw my sword on none." Summoned to Washington by his chief, Lee had arrived there a few days before the inauguration of Lincoln, and he had to make the decision after the bombardment of Sumter and the President's call for troops whether he should serve the national Government or Virginia. The active command of the Federal army with the succession to the chief place was virtually offered to him, but with his notion of States rights and his allegiance to Virginia his decision, though it cost him pain to make it, could have been no other than it was. He could not lead an army of invasion into his native State and after the ordinance of secession had been passed by the Virginia convention he resigned his commission and accepted the command of the Virginia forces.

Northern men may regret that Lee did not see his duty in the same light as did two other Virginians, Scott and Thomas, but censure's voice upon the action of such a noble soul is hushed. A careful survey of his character and life must lead the student of men and affairs to see that the course he took was from his point of view and judged by his inexorable and pure conscience the path of duty to which a high sense of honor called him. Could we share the thoughts of that high-minded man as he paced the broad pillared veranda of his noble Arlington house, his eyes glancing across the river at the flag of his country, waving above the dome of the Capitol and then resting on the soil of his native Virginia, we should be willing now to recognize in him one of the finest products of American life. For surely as the years go on we shall see that such a life can be judged by no partisan measure, and we shall come to look upon him as the English of our day regard Washington, whom little more than a century ago they delighted to call a rebel. Indeed in all essential characteristics Lee resembled Washington, and had the great work of his life been crowned with success, or had he chosen the winning side, the world would have acknowledged that Virginia could in a century produce two men who were the embodiment of public and private virtue.

“The avenging pen of history” has placed the name of Lee side by side with Washington. So writes the historian of to-day and so will the future historian prolong the noble record. The fame of Robert Lee is secure in that last appeal to:

Time the beautifier of the dead,  
Time the corrector where our judgements err,  
The test of Truth.





















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